

# Chapter 8 Historic and Cultural Preservation

## Vision

*Talbot County recognizes the importance of its historic resources. There are numerous groups located in the region dedicated to the preservation of historic and cultural heritage. Efforts to increase public awareness of the importance of preserving the County's past have been successful. The County has an attractive program of local incentives to assist owners of historic properties to enroll and rehabilitate their properties. Easement programs have also been successful in protecting key historic resources throughout the County.*

## Goal

To preserve and enhance Talbot County's rich cultural and historic heritage.

### I. Introduction

It is possible to experience Talbot County's history through appreciation of its historic resources and events. The early period of colonial settlement and subsequent eras are well represented in the County's historic architecture. These physical reminders of our history give depth and richness to the County, to past events, and to people's lives.

Historic resource preservation is about much more than the protection of historic structures. Historic resources can be defined as those elements that are significant for their association or linkage to events or persons that were important in the past. The County's history is also reflected in archeology and cultural events and is present in sites and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship or association.

The County's history is reflected in events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history, or are associated with the lives of significant persons in the county's past. Historic preservation enables this legacy to be protected and remembered. It allows for the past to be integrated with the present and reminds us that the old has a useful place alongside the new.

Talbot County has maintained a longstanding interest in historic preservation. Many Talbot County families can trace their roots to the earliest colonial settlements of the County. Private houses and public buildings are often carefully restored. New uses are found for historic buildings that no longer serve their original functions. A number of historic properties in the County have been designated or preserved through private efforts, local **Historic District zoning** and designation on the National Register of Historic Places.

In addition to preserving historic buildings and places, county residents also have a strong interest in preserving the cultural heritage of Talbot County by preserving traditional lifestyles, like that of the working waterman, whose heritage is threatened by a changing environment. Talbot County's traditions have long centered on farming, the seafood and maritime industries, and the many small rural villages in the County. It is important that these elements of cultural heritage be preserved as the County grows.

Many private historic preservation organizations play an important role in championing preservation efforts. The Talbot County Agricultural Fair, Tilghman Island Days Festival, Waterfowl Festival,

Nace's Day Parade in Trappe and the Tuckahoe Steam and Gas Association Show are only a few of the many examples of annual events and venues which honor the County's heritage and signify the importance of traditional cultural lifestyles to the people of Talbot County.

### **Talbot County Council and Historic Preservation**

The Talbot County Council has long recognized the importance of protecting historic resources within the county. In 1976, the Council passed the Talbot County Historic District Ordinance empowering the Historic Preservation Commission to protect historic properties as a safeguard for the heritage of the county.

The County Zoning Ordinance provides protection for historic properties by designating Historic District Overlay Zones. A historic district can consist of an individual building and grounds or a grouping of buildings.

Establishing local historic districts is entirely the product of local initiative. District controls are created and administered by local citizens and local government.

## **II. Talbot County Historic Preservation Commission**

The Talbot County Historic Preservation Commission (TCHPC) is made up of seven county residents appointed by the Talbot County Council for three-year terms, on the basis of qualifications in architecture, history or historic preservation according to standards established by State and federal programs. The Historic Preservation Commission receives part-time administrative and technical assistance from the County Department of Planning and Zoning.

The Commission reviews properties of historic and architectural significance, selects historic properties for nomination as local Historic Districts and reviews applications for changes to exterior features within existing districts. The Commission is also involved in the nomination of County properties to the National Register of Historic Places. As of 2015, the efforts of the Historic Preservation Commission have resulted in the designation of twenty one County Historic Districts. In addition, the Commission has undertaken several studies of historic properties and communities throughout the County.

Talbot County was approved as a Certified Local Government (CLG) in 1987. Local governments can participate in this program when the State Historic Preservation Officer certifies that the local government has established its own historic preservation commission and a program meeting federal and State standards. The CLG Program was established under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, a nationwide program of financial and technical assistance to preserve historic properties — buildings, structures, sites, neighborhoods and other places of importance in the historical and cultural life of the nation.

### **A. Community Awareness and Education**

Efforts should be made to increase local public awareness and education concerning the importance of historic preservation and the functions and role of the Historic Preservation Commission through use of print and electronic media.

Community interest in preservation is directly related to an understanding of the importance and value of preserving our heritage. Greater community awareness of the importance of historic preservation in the County could be achieved in a number of ways:

1. In conjunction with National Historic Preservation Week each May, the Historic Preservation Commission could sponsor local events geared toward recognition of Talbot County's commitment to preservation.
2. The TCHPC could more broadly publicize its role by reprising its annual awards program to recognize local excellence in restoration of historic properties.
3. Community awareness of historic preservation could also be enhanced by providing all Historic District property owners with a plaque for their properties which distinguishes them as historic or architecturally significant places. Several owners have purchased plaques when the offer was last made by the Commission.
4. More historical markers identifying and describing historic sites and events within the County would also serve to inform local residents and visitors of Talbot's rich heritage.
5. Participation in State and national scenic byway improvement programs and improvements may be an opportunity to increase public education and awareness of historic resources.

## B. Action Items

1. The Talbot County Historic Preservation Commission (TCHPC) should ~~recruit and fund a full-time~~ be supported by a planner trained and experienced in historic preservation ~~planner~~, to support the efforts of the Commission and to promote and support historic preservation programs.
2. The TCHPC should be consulted by the County's Technical Advisory Committee in the review of subdivisions or site plans that may impact historic resources.
3. The TCHPC should work to identify other properties eligible for Historic District status by updating the inventory of historic structures for the County, actively soliciting enrollment of eligible structures, seeking financial or other incentives for owners establishing Historic Districts, and reviewing permits for demolition or substantial alteration of identified structures.
4. The TCHPC should review the *Talbot County Code* in relation to the State model historic preservation ordinance and evaluate whether modifications to local legislation are appropriate.
5. The TCHPC should explore implementation of local incentives for adaptive reuse of historic properties.
6. The TCHPC should investigate and review other counties' preservation incentives to property owners, with a goal of adopting a local incentive program.

## III. Cooperation and Collaboration

There are many public and private groups in the County which support historic preservation. These include the Historic Preservation Commissions of Talbot County, Easton, St. Michaels and Oxford, Historic St. Michaels — Bay Hundred, Inc., Historic Easton and the Talbot County Historical Society. Talbot County cooperates with the surrounding historic organizations as needed. It would be fitting for these groups to meet on a regular basis to discuss common concerns, to maintain planning cohesion among all entities with respect to inventories and actions, and to share in each other's successes.

In 2005, the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority granted certification to the Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area. This Heritage Area offers a mechanism for coordinated and enhanced

heritage tourism by recognizing heritage sites in a four county area, including Talbot County.

Certification requires the Management Plan of the Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area to be adopted in each county's Comprehensive Plan. Talbot County recognizes and references the Management Plan in order to further opportunities for heritage tourism and support economic development. Talbot County also supports the goals of the Maryland Heritage Areas Program's ten year plan for its Heritage Areas.

The County should continue to actively support and encourage community events which focus on the cultural heritage of the County. Museums and cultural events provide residents and visitors an opportunity to learn about the traditional ways of life that are an important part of the County's heritage.

## **IV. Conclusions**

Talbot County established a Historic Preservation Commission almost forty years ago and created a system of voluntary zoning overlays to designate Historic Districts. Since then, just twenty one of arguably hundreds of historic structures in the County jurisdiction have been designated as Historic Districts.

Education and collaboration are two important strategies to increase participation in the Historic District program. However, additional property owner incentives are necessary in order to preserve the remaining links to the County's rich history.

Historic preservation is a challenge in any rural area. Historic resources are less visible than in towns and cities and can be overlooked. Such resources are nevertheless significant elements of the area's rural and historic character that should be protected wherever possible.

The Historic Preservation Commission remains a valuable means of assisting homeowners and the community to appreciate and protect its heritage.

### **Historic Preservation Commission Policies**

8-1 The County will continue to encourage and support the Talbot County Historic Preservation Commission.

8-2 The County will encourage restoration and/or adaptive reuse of historic sites and structures.

8-3 The County shall make a clear statement of policy that the Historic Preservation Commission shall have the authority to oversee the creation and preservation of historic structures.

8-4 The Management Plan of the Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area was adopted and made a part of the Comprehensive Plans of Caroline, Kent, Queen Anne's and Talbot counties in 2005. This update of the Comprehensive Plan incorporates by reference all applicable portions of the Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area Management Plan.

8-5 The County will expand its efforts to protect and enhance the cultural heritage of the area by sponsoring heritage events and activities.